

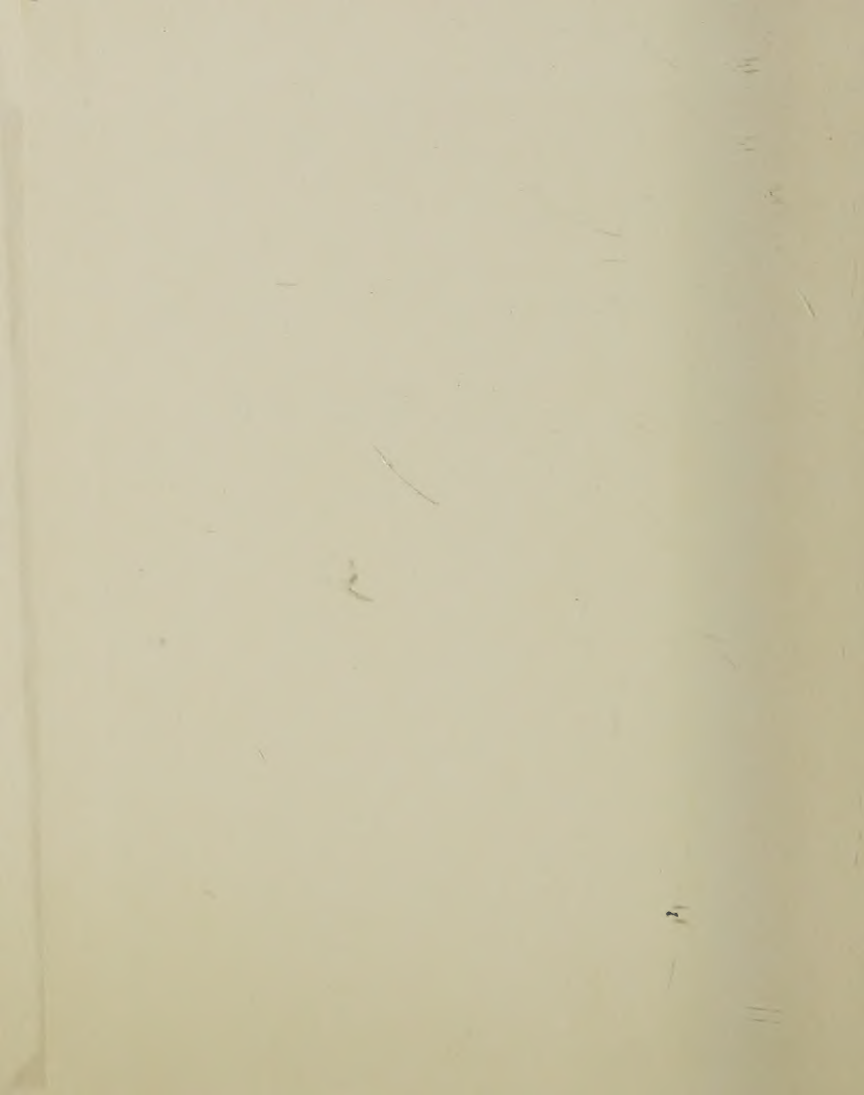


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To Aunt Emil

from Alice.

Christmas. 09.





Morillo

L'ANGELO

A CHRISTMAS SKETCH

TRANSLATED AND ADAPTED FROM THE
FRENCH OF

L. D. VENTURA
Author of Peppino etc.

BY
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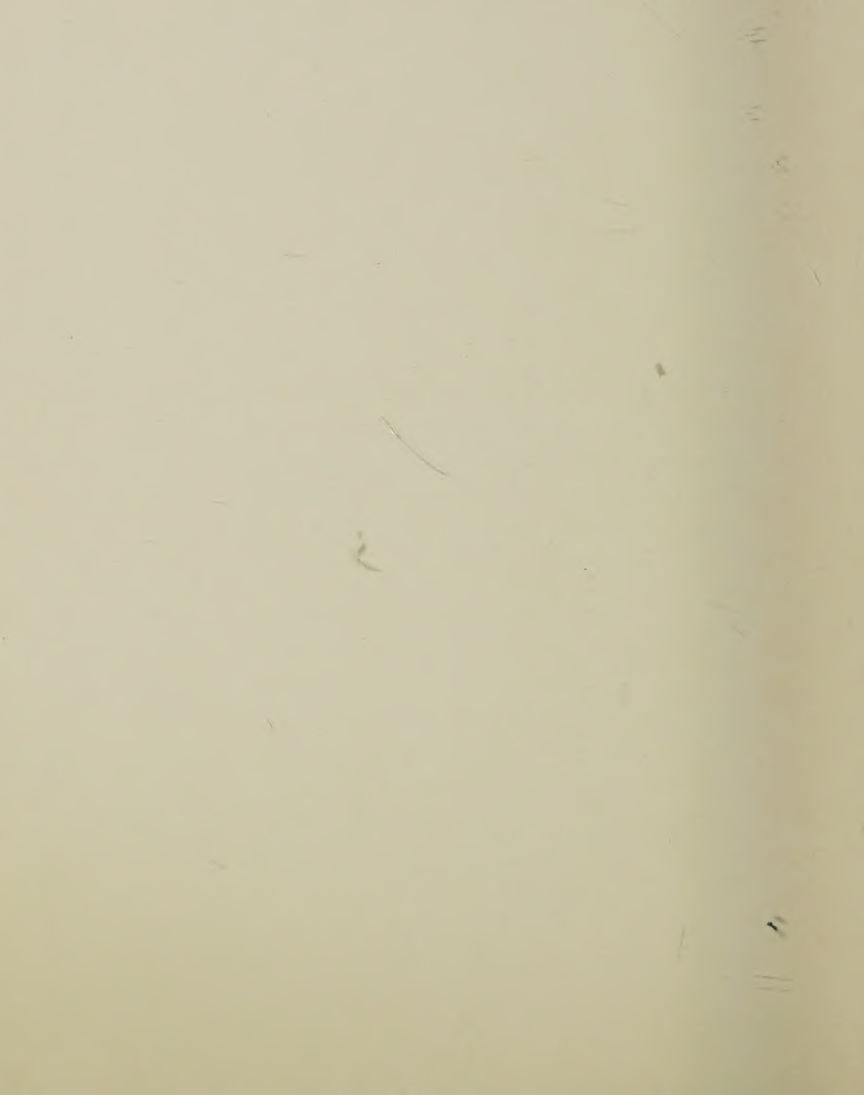
PHILADELPHIA
1892

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Eternal glory to the man who has chosen a love of the highest kind ! His happiness will grow untrammelled and will intensify with every hour, with every minute. He will enter deeper and deeper into the paradise of his soul, which is the Infinite. He is truly happy.

N. GOGOL, *Dead Souls*.





THEY called her *l'Angelo*, for she had come among them with deeds of charity and love, and to the warm southern natures of the poor and miserable little Italians, whose fate she had taken to heart, she seemed one of God's angels, straying from the fields of Paradise. She was tall and Juno-like ; and none thought to ask her age, for her gentle spirit laughed at wrinkles, and sentiment was her fountain of youth.



Every Friday at five o'clock she made her appearance at the corner facing the clock over the Eastern Depot, where the children of the fruit-venders were on the lookout for her. A glance at the clock—a glance at the street. If the clock struck the half hour before she came—it must be fast; if she chanced to appear five minutes before the hour—it must be slow. But she was sure to come? As sure as spring follows winter, or sunshine follows rain; and then beautiful it was to see the delight of the Antonios, the Filippis, the Francescos, the Maddalenas and the Graziellas of the quarter. "*Buon giorno*" here—"Benvenuta" there. They skipped about her joyously and surrounded her, until she was nearly suffocated by the band of gamins, who pulled at her dress,







—kissed her beautiful hands and called her *Angelo*. She was content and proud—her face, fair and radiant with health and smiles, came like a breath of spring, bringing life and happiness into the dingy quarter.

One Christmas eve, accompanied by an Italian friend, she came in a carriage—not to spare her dainty little shoes—but to bring all manner of good things to her poor Italians, so far from their sunny skies, and to tell them that to them also was born the Christ-child, bringing “Peace on earth, good will to men.” Even the day before, in expectation of her arrival, the poor little homes began to assume a more cleanly appearance: the floors were washed, the chairs were re-caned, and now the biggest piece of coal was blazing on the fire, where the kettle boiled and bubbled to prepare a cup of coffee for

their *Angelo*, who brought them all, bonbons and toys, besides some more useful gift for each ; warm stockings and a pair of shoes for this one, a little jacket for that one, even to portmonnaies for the savings so carefully hoarded to buy the snug little house with a pretty front on the Broadway of Viggiano, their much-loved native home.

It would be well-nigh impossible to attempt to enumerate all the things that came out of the fairy box on four wheels ; suffice it to say that the houses were full of joy and childish laughter, and that *l'Angelo* forgot her five o'clock reception while she drank her cup of coffee and disdained not to taste a crust of *pannatone* ; during which little ceremony she was exposed to the odd gallantries of the handsome young Italians, all unconscious of their beauty, who had done their



best at making a toilet in her honor, and who offered her gaudy bouquets, and accompanied her to the carriage with harmonica and guitar.

She was sad as she got into the carriage, and—was it a presentiment? Who knows? She turned to her friend and exclaimed :

“ Alas ! who can tell where I shall be next Christmas ? ”

Her lips smiled as she spoke, but a tear trembled on her lashes, and the Italian soul beside her was stirred with sympathy at these tears so truly Italian in the eyes of an American.

“ Who can tell indeed ! But why should you not be here, and why should I not be with you ? he said, trying to be gay.

The truth is they were both very sad as they left the quarter, and at sight of her emotion he felt himself drawn to her America,



whilst she seemed in spirit to have taken flight to his Italy, the Italy of Dante's Beatrice. As they rolled away through the narrow streets, the children saluted her on all sides with cries of *l'Angelo ! l'Angelo ! l'Angelo !*



"Yes, you are certainly their angel," he said, "and there must be a paradise hidden on earth, and they in their innocent simplicity have found one of its angels."

They spoke Italian, as was their wont, for she delighted to hear *il parlar celeste*, as she was pleased to call it, on the lips of an Italian ; but that evening he seemed sad, and angry with himself, complaining that faith and enthusiasm were slipping away from him, whilst the poor creatures they had



Ary Scheffer

just left could find both hope and inspiration from a benefit received. *L'Angelo* tried to console him, treating him the while like a naughty child.

"Ah! why am I not like them? I should be happy at least on Christmas eve."

"What a queer fellow you are, and what an absurd wish!" she said, shaking her finger playfully at him.

Christmas passed like so many others; months slipped by and then one day came a message:

My dear friend:—My sister's health is failing and we must take her abroad immediately. We go direct to Paris, but we hope to pass our next Christmas in Italy. Have you any word to send to your people down there?

Yours,

L'ANGELO.



THE FIRST CHRISTMAS

Correggio

He was disconsolate. *L'Angelo* was going away ! Christmas was near at hand and what would become of the poor little Italians, for whom the beautiful American had played the part of Christmas Fairy !

With last Christmas memories of
ing through his brain,
L'Angelo's friend start-
ed out, not caring much
where his steps might lead him. Mechanically he took his way toward her closed and deserted house, and then on to the Italian quarter. As soon as the dusky little creatures caught sight of him, he was assailed on all sides by cries of "Where is *la Signora* ? *la Madonna* ? Where is *L'Angelo* ?



She has forgotten us, she has not been here for a long time."

"No, my children," he said to them, "*l'Angelo*, the good fairy, has not forgotten you; she is warming herself under the sunny skies of our Italy—down there, and she will come again—next Christmas, let us hope.

The children began to cry, the women twisted the hems of their aprons and the men nervously twirled their mustaches. In truth they are tender-hearted, these poor people to whom we are kind, alas! too rarely.

Again they had washed their floors in hopes that perhaps at Christmas the *Signora* might come, again they had re-caned the chairs. Garlands of leaves hung from the ceilings, Christmas wreaths decorated the walls after the American fashion, and the kettle boiled and bubbled again on the glowing fire as cheerily as the year before. They drew him into a house and placed

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him upon an elevated seat, for hoping that *L'Angelo* might come, to the usual Christmas ceremonies had been added the baptism of a little one, who since early morning had been kicking and crowing in a cradle covered with white curtains.

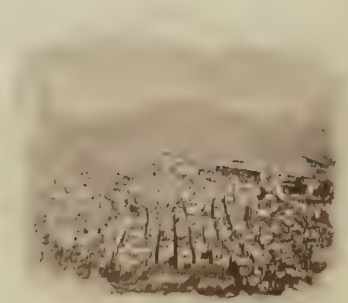
Four handsome lads came rushing into the room with mandolins and guitars ready to begin the serenade, thinking she was there ; and it was for her they had prepared this seat, a sort of throne, upon which they forced him to sit almost against his will. How he longed for her serenity, her smile, her charming womanliness, her noble courage ; and he saw in imagination her dainty hands touched as she passed by these children of the good God.

"Ah, my dear friend," he said to himself, "if you could but see them, disappointed, tears in their eyes, our poor Italians,



waiting for *P. Angelo* -waiting for you, their Christmas Fairy, without whom there can be no happiness in Christmas-tide."

It was indeed pitiful to see them watching for her, whilst she—whilst she—





HE was at Naples—the city full of songs and shouts of merry laughter; and at Christmas-time one might almost imagine the end of the world had come, there is such a hubbub and noise: rolling of carriages, cracking of whips, braying of donkeys, and salutations exchanged from one end of the street to the other. You jump out of bed, dress hurriedly and find yourself in the *Via Roma*—but not the *Via Roma* of every day: it has become narrower, longer, more crowded and noisy. Here and there the sidewalk disappears under two unending rows of *bancarelle*. These *bancarelle* are open-air booths, where a little of every-thing is



sold, and which serve their owners as convenient spots from which to cry their goods. Whistling, blowing trumpets, attracting the attention of the passer-by in every conceivable way, they make themselves hoarse, boasting the worth of their wares ; books, photographs, brushes, soap, baskets, wax *bambinos*, sugar *madonnas*, patent coffee-pots, carpets, chairs, whips, vases, statuettes, bric-a-brac and all sorts of fruit in utter confusion. You can buy whatever you want provided you have ten francs to spend. Carried away by the mad gayety of the season, as if some great good-fortune had fallen to them from heaven, everybody buys and rushes home laden with all sorts of odd parcels.

L'Angelo had passed her morning in the *Via Roma*, then she had gone to Santa Brigida, to Pignasecca, to Monte Olivete and to Foria. In the *Via Roma* the crowd

was made up of pleasure-seekers ; in the poorer quarters, that she visited later, she found a famished crowd that came to buy from the mass of eatables that lay about. There were mountains of vegetables, obelisks of bread, pyramids of fruit, curious baskets filled with fish, armies of turkeys tied together in pairs and thrown on the ground struggling to be free, plucked chickens hung up by the legs, festoons of sausages, and in the midst of all this, another population of venders ringing bells and waving aloft flaring torches and slippery, squirming eels.

L' Ingelo stood observing all these people pushing and crowding to be the first to buy, as though fearful lest this conglomeration of food might be devoured in an instant by some omnipotent Gargantua ; and she watched the crowd surging past her—



priests, clerks, servants, peasants, workmen, all pressing about the booths of the street-merchants, who pocketed now a sou, now a franc, and sometimes a shining louis d'or, whilst the buyers jostled one another and swore and sang. And above all the noise this cry was heard: "Christmas! Christmas! Come buy! Come buy!"

Mingling with the crowd *l'Angelo* was in her element and enjoyed to the full this careless life that takes thought only for the day; and while she looked on untiringly, she murmured: "Where do these people get money to buy? Are there no poor in Naples?" Not on Christmas day, for then all love one another and there



is a sort of socialism among the people, an improvised communism: the rich give to the poor, and the poor are rich too, at least one day of the year.

It was not the hungry crowd that most enchanted *P. Lugato*, but the home life that began with the quiet of the evening, when the streets were deserted and the torches of the booths were extinguished, when from the windows of her hotel she saw other lights sending their soft rays through neighboring windows and balconies, and filtering through the cracks of doors. Through one of these windows, gathered about a table, she saw a family united and happy, smiling into one another's eyes, drawn closer together on this Christmas eve. The mother, radiant after her mysterious work of the day, the father resting, and the children counting up their little gifts. The life of these Italians seemed to be a part of her life,



and she was a stranger only outwardly to them and Italy. After sitting long at the windows watching, and thinking of native land and distant friends, *l'Angelo*, with her brother and sister, who was now quite well, went out with the rest of the city to see the fire-works so well worth seeing in Naples on Christmas eve.

Between ten and twelve the people begin to assemble on balconies and roofs. The heavens are aflame—a Roman candle here, a rocket there, wheels and circles of fire and showers of many colored stars ; the houses reflect the light; the streets are sown with sparks. Above, below, from the hill-tops to the bay, there is a perpetual crackling, a carnival of fire-works. Roman candles and Bengal fires are the most popular among the children to whom is confided implicitly



the task of keeping the city illuminated. With one arm outstretched, and laughing, but half-fearful faces turned away, the enthusiastic little heroes stand bravely at their posts amid showers of falling sparks.

While the superb city was still ablaze with light and fire, silently our three Americans strolled toward the Riviera di Chiaia, and from time to time a cry of admiration escaped their lips, as a rocket shot across the bay lighting it with weird beauty. As they were nearing the church of San Pasquale,

some lads came out of one of the dilapidated little houses and sitting down upon a bench near the door, began to tune the guitars they carried.

L'Angelo drew her companions aside imploring them not to speak, and hidden in the shadow of the church, they listened to one of the serenades so often heard under the starry skies of Italy. The lads began to sing a romance of Rotoli, with this refrain :

“E penso sempre a voi, angelo mio,
Come a un angel del cielo, angel di Dio ;
E penso sempre a voi, angelo mio,
Come a un angel del cielo, angelo d'oro.”

Angelo mio, my angel,
Thou art an angel of God,
And I think of thee always, my loved one,
My shining angel of God.



Surrounded by this marvellous nature, though strangers in a strange land, they had had their Christmas serenade. Deep in their hearts they loved Italy, for national feeling disappears in the peace and goodwill of Christmas day, and far from her home and loved ones, far from the poor whose fairy she had been, Providence had sent to *l'Angelo* this sweet remembrance of a dear name, this echo of affection from an Italian quarter in America, like a benediction from heaven.





Kaulbach

